CONSIDERATIONS

RESPECTING THE

PRESENT STATE

OF

GREAT BRITAIN.

[PRICE SIXPENCE.]

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WHEN the high tide of unmanly prejudice, uncontrouled paſſion, and party rage, threatens univerſal deſolation, to attempt to oppoſe it may ſeem no leſs daring than fruitleſs. But liberal and independent minds owe to their country their beſt and moſt active exertions, in ſupport of her moſt eſſential intereſts. Unconnected with parties of every denomination, uncontaminated by the pollution of venality and corruption, and detached from thoſe political connections which warp the judgment and bias the mind,—I take leave, in the name of a reſpectable body of Citizens, to offer a few brief animadverſions on that furious zeal for Prerogative

rogative which ſeems to pervade men of every rank in this country. When Peers contend for the power of the Crown, and Members of the Ariſtocracy would enlarge their ſphere of domination, we are at no loſs to account for the principles by which they are actuated. But that furor for theſe objects which has ſeized private gentlemen and humble citizens, is a phænomenon which is not ſo eaſily to be traced to its origin. To a man of reflection, whoſe views of the political conſtitution are enlarged by a familiar acquaintance with the hiſtory of Britain, no object can be more alarming than a violent propenſity in the great body of the People, to diveſt themſelves of their liberties, and lay them down at the foot of the Throne.

This, it is apprehended, is the import of the numerous late addreſſes from every quarter of the kingdom, againſt the leaſt corrupted and moſt beneficial Houſe of Commons that the preſent age has ever beheld; of the general adulation of a motely Miniſtry, who owe their elevation to an influence believed to be inimical to the Conſtitution; and of that zeal which prevails to exclude from Parliament men of the higheſt abilities, and of the ſtricteſt probity, and to commiſſion only thoſe who may ſubſerve the views of the preſent Adminiſtration.

A ſlender portion of penetration is requiſite to enable the plaineſt underſtanding to trace to its ſource that criminal defection from the cauſe of liberty which at preſent gives ſo juſt cauſe of alarm. Fourteen hundred proprietors of India ſtock, ſupported by a numerous and powerful faction of Grandees, watchful for any handle againſt the then Adminiſtration,

hiſtration, infuſed a malignant ſpirit into the maſs of the people, which has fermented and diffuſed itſelf among every rank of men. Intereſt ſtimulated the former, ambition the latter. The body of the people have become the tools of both. By artifice and impoſture the cry has been kept up; and the deluded multitude unite in the clamour againſt their own ſteady and uncorrupted friends. Chartered Rights began, and Prerogative continues the outcry.

But when the preſent delirium ſhall ſubſide, it will occur to every candid mind, that the Houſe of Commons have, from the Revolution, been the bulwark of Britiſh liberty. Nor will it be leſs obvious, that the RIGHTS of no man, or body of men, were violated by the Commons, when they adopted the India bill. Have any individuals, or corporate bodies, any civil rights, which ought not to be forfeited by *felonious* deeds?—Hath the thief, the robber, the murderer, a right to any thing but puniſhment?—Hath not the Committee of the Houſe of Commons convicted the Eaſt India Company of theſe, and other nefarious crimes?—Have not millions been ſacrificed at the ſhrine of their rapacity and covetouſneſs?—Is not the notoriety of theſe criminal practices more than ſufficient for diveſting them of the direction of a monopoly, adverſe to the natural rights of men, and in the criminal management whereof they appear evidently incorrigible?—Hath not the great river Ganges, choaked up by the bodies of millions of murdered innocents, cried aloud to Heaven for vengeance on men who patronized the perpetrators of ſuch atrocious crimes?—Wiſe and good men have obſerved the puniſhment of that guilt which hath been contracted in the Eaſt, in the diſmemberment of the Britiſh empire in

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the Weſt, in our expence of blood and treaſure, of national honour and conſequence, in our late wars with our natural and unnatural enemies. Hath any Verres met his deſerved puniſhment?—Have not the ſpoils of an innocent and virtuous people proved an opiate to quiet the minds of the Directors, and of all who affected an averſion from the crimes of the Company's Servants.

Have the chartered rights of this Company never been violated by any former Parliament?—Were they not equally infringed by the bill which was rejected by the Commons, as by that which was rejected by the Peers?—Will any friend of mankind be biaſſed in favour of the former, becauſe it propoſes to continue men in the management who have betrayed their incapacity and inſenſibility to the rights of human nature?—Is it not highly in favour of the latter, that, while it preſerves to the Proprietors every iota of their property, it diveſts men of the direction who had forfeited all claim to any degree of public confidence, and places it in the hands of men eminent by their capacity, independence, and probity, ſubject to the inſpection and controul of the natural guardians of our rights.

Still may it not be aſked, is there one man among ten thouſand clamourers againſt this bill, who has ſtudied and underſtands it?—And are they not the dupes of deſigning men, who rail and exclaim, only becauſe they have been *taught* to inveigh againſt the infringement of chartered rights? Societies incorporated by charters, for their own and the public benefit, conſcious of obtempering the purpoſes of their inſtitution, remain perfectly ſecure in the protection of the laws, while

while a Company, who have violated every law divine and human, have diveſted themſelves of all protection from good government, and become obnoxious to the ſanction of the laws.

IRRATIONAL and factious as was the abſurd cry of violated chartered rights, it proved an apt inſtrument, in the hands of a numerous and courtly faction, of their own elevation. By their partizans and retainers, the malignant ſpirit was fomented among the lower claſſes of the people; and the party who had approved the peace, in connection with others who reprobated it, ſupported by an inviſible influence, coaleſced in ſupplanting the Adminiſtration who had been guilty of the India bill, and produced themſelves as the oſtenſible Servants of the Crown. Much ſcurrility and invective have been liberally beſtowed on a former coalition: By what ſpecies of logic it has been reprobated, while the preſent miniſterial coalition, of no leſs heterogeneous members, is conſecrated and applauded, it is very difficult to determine. Certain it is, that a Miniſtry adverſe to an uncorrupted Houſe of Commons, muſt be adverſe to the rights and franchiſes of the great body of the people. That improvidence and verſatility by which the vulgar of various ranks have always been diſtinguiſhed, never appeared in a more glaring light than at the preſent period. Nor can it be compared to any other æra in our hiſtory ſo properly, as when a ſimilar frenzy ſeized them after the reſtoration of Charles II.

FEW are ſo weak as to believe that liberty can have any exiſtence in Britain when the Houſe of Commons is either annihilated, or, what is worſe, falls under the direction and

influence

influence of the other branches of the legiſlative body. The Commons are the ſole guardians of our rights. If they are purchaſed by the partizans of power, or ſold by the avarice or ambition of their conſtituents; or if the people ſuffer their minds to be enflamed againſt their real friends, and reſign themſelves into the hands of thoſe whoſe power and greatneſs bear an exact proportion to the depreſſion and inſignificance of their inferiors,—ought any man of ſenſe to hope for the preſervation of his freedom in circumſtances ſo inauſpicious to the rights of human nature? When the executive powers have obtained the direction of the legiſlative, ſimple monarchy takes place, and the antient Conſtitution is diſſolved. Nay, it were more beneficial to the nation to have no Houſe of Commons, than one obſequious to the mandates of the Miniſtry; for if the Lower Houſe were diſmiſſed, much expence to Government would be ſaved; but the ſpirit of liberty would ſubſide, and the inferior ranks ſink into a ſupine indifference reſpecting every public concern—anxious only to court, by all the arts of ſervility, a domineering ariſtocracy, and the faction of paraſites uppermoſt at Court.

SHOCKING to every remaining ſpark of liberality in the minds of men as the idea of ſuch ſervile circumſtances muſt be, they ſeem to be eagerly courted at the preſent criſis. By the diſmiſſion of a Parliament uncorrupted by court-influence, and that avidity with which the great body of the People ſubſerve the purpoſes of the new Miniſtry in the election of a new Houſe of Commons, we have every reaſon to apprehend, that the voice of Liberty will no more be heard in the Senate, and the dictates of a junto will be deciſive, and determine every deliberation. In ſuch circumſtances, the

guardians

guardians will become the ſubverters of the Conſtitution, and the ancient friends of the People, the favourers of their ſubjugation.

Ought not the ſwarms iſſued from the ſeat of dominion, after the diſſolution of Parliament, to have awakened the jealouſy of the People, when they beheld them overſpread the land, prepared to conſume every remaining germen of Majeſty in the People. When the members of the Ariſtocracy unite their forces, in order to influence their inferiors and dependants, they neceſſarily overwhelm them with their power, and ſmother and extinguiſh the laſt ſpark of freedom in the human breaſt. Were our Nobles themſelves endowed with that liberality of ſentiment which inſpired their anceſtors, they would diſcern in their own zeal the ſymptoms of decline, and in their ſucceſſes in ſubjecting the People an alarming premonition of the downfall of their own importance.

Immediately before the downfall of the Weſtern Empire, the account given of the manners of the Nobility in Rome ſeems deſcriptive of thoſe of our own times. "The Ariſtocracy (ſays Ammianus Marcellinus *) poſſeſſed of immenſe treaſures, and diſſolved in luxurious pleaſures, were addicted to gaming, parade and extravagance. They gave coſtly entertainments to the people, whom they ſent out to fight their battles, whilſt they themſelves remained more intent on the events of the circus than the events of war. They encouraged the people to ſpend their time in drinking-houſes, and

* Lib. 14. cap. 6.

under thoſe booths which were the invention of Catullus. Their voluptuous refinements,—their ridiculous and oſtentatious cavalcades,—their ſelfiſhneſs and contempt of the tendereſt duties of humanity,—their preference of the ſociety of the adepts in the ſcience and tricks of play, to that of men of learning and virtue,——prepared them for becoming a prey to thoſe barbarous nations who eaſily conquered and enſlaved them."

When thoſe of the firſt diſtinction are ſeen running from Rome to Spoletum, creeping into the receptacles of pollution and venality, and diſperſing around them the influences of corruption—when their inferiors ſedulouſly court the wages of iniquity, and voluntarily reſign their inalienable rights, can we avoid inſtituting a compariſon between the preſent and paſt times?

If individuals are diſpoſed to ſubmit to the forfeiture of Liberty, and the reſignation of their franchiſes, for a pittance of preſent profit to themſelves, can they reconcile their minds to the idea of entailing on their poſterity the loſs of thoſe ineſtimable rights, which were tranſmitted to them by their fathers? At an immenſe expence were they purchaſed by their anceſtors, and retained by a ſucceſſion of able and virtuous citizens, in oppoſition to the inſidious encroachments, which in every age and country have been attempted by the partizans of domination: And muſt not every man of honour feel indignant to be told, that he has bartered for the objects of avarice or ambition, the gratitude due to the memory of his anceſtors, and the juſtice which he owes to the rights of his children and poſterity for ever.

Much is it to be feared, that vain are the hopes which center in the man, who, ſuddenly elevated to the higheſt pinnacle of power, deſerted the cauſe he had formerly eſpouſed, and renounced the principles, the maintenance whereof had immortalized his father. Did ever a ſtickler for the rights of the People fail to ſacrifice them to the views of the rank to which he was advanced? In all ancient and modern free States the people were betrayed by their truſtees. They reſtrained not oppreſſions out of the reach of which they themſelves were placed. Tribunes become conſuls or dictators, veſted the Senate with the power of taxation, the power of diſpenſing with the laws, and abrogating them. Power improves not the underſtandings of men in the ſame degree that it perverts their hearts. What is to be expected from the man who inſiſted with us to put our purſes into thoſe hands in which we had no confidence?—who diſſolved the Commons, becauſe they were ſuſpicious of their natural enemies, and armed the latter with powers to overawe the country in the exerciſe of the ſacred right of chuſing their own Repreſentatives? If he adviſed the meaſures adopted at Court, he ought previouſly to have been aſcertained of their rectitude. If prerogative entitles to a choice of Miniſters, are not the Commons equally entitled to conſider, whether the Miniſtry ſo choſen are poſſeſſed of ſuch principles as merit the high truſt of diſpoſing of the public treaſures of their conſtituents? Will any private gentleman entruſt his finances to the management of thoſe whom he has reaſon to ſuſpect of unfriendly principles, or ſiniſter practices? Would men, ſtaunch to the beſt intereſts of their country, have grounded a diſſolution upon addreſſes impetrated by the arts of intrigue, impoſture, and artifice, and dictated by certain partizans,

tizans, whom the ſober and judicious, in every quarter, did not think it worth while ſtatedly to oppoſe.

By means of theſe adulatory addreſſes, the People have given their ſuffrage to a meaſure, which has admitted an inundation of Ariſtocratic Influence, which muſt overthrow every barrier, and bear down every remaining veſtige of Political Freedom and Public Spirit. When the people of Geneva (anno 1738), cajoled by their Grandees, bound themſelves to elect their Syndics out of the members of the ſame council, poor people forgot that, by this meaſure, they had rendered their Magiſtrates their MASTERS FOR EVER!

NEED we, from this and a thouſand ſuch inſtances, infer the futility of thoſe reaſons by which the late alarming meaſures have been vindicated? Ought the cry of the People to be conſidered as a juſtification of a plan of Government, ſo violent and adverſe to the natural ſentiments of the unbiaſſed mind? Have the People information, ſpirit, and perſeverance ſufficient to counterwork the ſilent, but powerful and active conſpiracy of their ſuperiors? Have they leiſure to inveſtigate, to come to mature reſolution, to pronounce a decided judgment, and to guard againſt being led by thoſe who live but to increaſe their own power? It has been well obſerved, that the People are determined by the *incident of the moment*. It is the ſpirit of our Conſtitution to provide them with guardians, who are more competent judges of their rights than they themſelves are, and who are at liberty to reject their moſt poſitive inſtructions. They are clients who muſt be directed by the counſel they have choſen: Patients, who muſt obtemperate the preſcriptions of their

their phyſicians. When the late addreſſes of the People had the unexpected and wonderful effects they produced, their joys and triumphs tranſported them to ſuch a pitch of frenzy, that their ſuffrages have generally amounted to the reſignation of themſelves and their country to that phalanx of power which their late Repreſentatives were willing to reſiſt. In the ſame manner, the Romans were ſo tranſported with joy when pay was appointed to their ſoldiers for the *firſt* time, that they could not remark that, at the *ſame* time alſo, a tax was impoſed, which involved many of their beſt citizens in poverty and wretchedneſs.

With deep regret we therefore muſt conclude, that the inhabitants of this Iſland ſeem no longer capable of Liberty, —no longer worthy of the bleſſings of a Free Government. Servile, venal, and corrupted in the extreme, they are prepared for the domination of arbitrary controul. Vain, verſatile, and frivolous, they are ready to become the dupes of flattery, impoſture, and cajolement. Blinded by preconceived opinions, ungrounded predilections and averſions, and incapable of ſuſtaining the character of Members of a Free State, or of paying any attention to the remonſtrances of the Conſtitution, they imitate the Romans after they had loſt every feeling of Liberty. When Cato, the *laſt* and beſt of the Romans, offered his ſentiments in the Senate, he was ſilenced by every mark of averſion and contempt. Such is the reception at preſent given the beſt men and moſt accompliſhed orators of any age or country, when ſtruggling againſt the bias of Britons to enſlave themſelves. No better reception of the few obſervations now offered can be expected. Still, we would hope, that the time will come, when thoſe eyes which

which now exclude every ray of light that might diſcover the real ſtate of this country, will be opened—the preſent ſyſtem of impoſture will be detected—and the ancient attachment to our happy Conſtitution ſhall be reſumed.—— That an event ſo propitious to the moſt valuable intereſts of our country may ſpeedily be accompliſhed, is the wiſh of

May 1. 1784. VINDEX.